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## THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION

### IV

#### בן סורר ומורה

תניא בן סורר ומורה לא היה ולא עמיד להיות ולמה נכתב דרוש וקבל שכל (סנהדרין עא.)  
“There never was, nor will there ever be, such a thing as a ‘disobedient and rebellious son,’” a ברייתא states. “Why, then, this law? So that you may inquire into it and profit by your inquiry.”

This statement of our Sages gives us the comforting assurance that there has never been, nor will there ever be, in our history a son whose disobedient and rebellious conduct meets with all the criteria of the law that would class him as so utterly beyond redemption that his execution under the law would have to be regarded as a way of saving his soul, ימות זכאי ואל ימות חייב. Rather, this law was set down primarily as an academic problem designed to promote study and thus to increase our knowledge of education in both theory and practice.

Guided by the statement cited above, let us venture a look into this law. God creates and molds the souls of parents and children alike, and arranges marriages as a means for the moral and spiritual training of children. It is He Who has laid down this law concerning a son who represents a complete, irreversible failure of every parental endeavor to give him proper moral and spiritual training. Even if our study were to yield only a few helpful suggestions for the education of our children, we would have good cause to feel amply rewarded for our effort—דרוש וקבל שכל.

A detailed study of the law would seem to indicate that all its provisions are based on one premise. In order for a “disobedient son” to incur the death penalty, not only must his actions reflect extreme

brutality and lustfulness but, in addition, the mortals who act as his judges must be given no reason to think that his parents may have left something undone in his training. Only if, as far as human judgment can tell, the parents have not merely fulfilled their obligations towards their son but have been completely above reproach also in their own conduct, leaving no room for any question whether their son might have turned out differently had he been raised by better parents, can a judge accept the son's conduct as proof that he is indeed beyond redemption. Only then can the judge conclude that life amidst human society will certainly not succeed where the youth's own parents failed and that he will only continue to deteriorate, so that having him put to death can be viewed as actually saving his soul.

Accordingly, unless we are completely mistaken in our assumptions, a truly "rewarding" inquiry into this law would have to include not only the individual criteria of depravity that necessitates the death penalty but also the circumstances under which a "disobedient son" is *not* subject to the death penalty. In this manner we will be able to see which aspects of human nature are viewed by God's Law as the most serious challenges to character training and what the attitude of the parents must be if the moral training of their child is to bring the desired results.

The first point that should engage our attention is the age span during which the death penalty is applicable in the case of a "disobedient and rebellious son." We note that this period is limited to the first three months after the boy has reached the age of puberty. Under normal conditions, this would be the first three months after the boy has completed his thirteenth year. We see, therefore, that the law regards this particular period as a crucial phase in the formation of the boy's character, a phase that will shape the rest of the boy's life. Consequently, all those in a position to have a part in the moral training of a young person are urged to give him fatherly help and guidance especially at this critical juncture in his life so that, under their judicious care, the youth's character may develop from the sapling stage to full and healthy maturity.

Educators commonly regard this period as the formative phase in a boy's development. But they do not necessarily view this period from the vantage point provided by the Law of God for our guidance. It is usually regarded as the period when the young person's "bad side"

becomes particularly noticeable. The fact that this period is marked by an awakening of hitherto latent sensual impulses and appetites that can indeed degenerate into vice and base passions leads unthinking educators to see this period only as the awakening of what they call the "evil" in man, which they, the teachers, feel they must fight and suppress.

But let us consider the reverse side of this coin, as it were. The Law of God regards this time, when "evil first awakens" in a boy, as the phase that will decide his future character, and also as the phase during which specified excesses of immoral conduct are to be regarded as a sure indication that the boy is beyond redemption. This is diametrically opposed to what so many educators seem to believe. For He Who creates the souls of men and assigns them their moral destiny expects, precisely during this period, not merely the first manifestations of "evil" impulses but, much more important, the triumphant emergence of the young person's potential for "goodness." As our Sages put it, (קידושין ל:) *ברא הקב"ה יצר הרע ברא לו חורה חבלין (קידושין ל:)* God has ordained that man must wage a struggle with his base passions; at the same time, however, He has given him the weapons with which he can win the battle. Even as the struggle begins, God awakens within the youth that moral strength, that joy in the discovery of truth, that desire to emulate all things great, noble and good, and that high-minded self-respect which will make him too proud to surrender to the temptations of sensuality and vulgarity.

All this applies particularly to a Jewish boy growing into Jewish manhood under the direction of parents who have truly done their duty. Such a boy has been guided from his earliest childhood by the shining example of his parents. They have demonstrated to him by their own conduct how man should happily subordinate all his aspirations to the higher authority of God, and that, in fact, this is the only way in which man can achieve true happiness in his life and work. They have shown him by their own behavior how the genuine Jew banishes all that is sordid and ignoble from his life, how he places the imprint of Divine consecration even upon the most physical aspects of daily living, and how every phase of life, public and private, should be ruled by one and the same spirit and ideal—the spirit and the ideal expressed by the term *mitzvah*, duty as commanded by God.

Moreover, the boy's parents have personally led him to the

wellsprings from which they themselves have drawn the knowledge of their duty along with the courage and inspiration to act accordingly. This is the same source that guided all his ancestors before him, whose heritage he is about to assume. His religious education consisted of something more than just a few hours of practice over a six-month period culminating in a melodramatic puppet show of "confirmation." His entire childhood was a preparation for a true confirmation, a tempering and steeling of his heart and mind for his grand entrance into the ranks of Jewish men. A home in which Jewish parents have fulfilled their Jewish duty cannot possibly produce a son with a personality so gross and brutal that his early death should be accepted as the redemption of a soul that would have ended in total depravity if the boy had been allowed to live as an adult in the midst of human society—בן סורר ומורה לא היה ולא עתיד להיות—

God girds the youth with the strength of His aid so that the youth may prevail in the struggle that awaits him, the struggle in which the Jewish boy prepares for manhood. It is not without good reason that God's Law chose that particular juncture in the life of a boy as the point at which he is to be considered as having "come of age." It is only appropriate that he should be called *bar mitzvah*, literally, a "son of the commandment." Fortunate the parents and the child if all the parents' efforts in the rearing of their child were directed toward the end that, when he entered the age of his personal struggle toward manhood, they would be able to surrender him joyously to the *mitzvah*, the command of God. This means that he will live and behave henceforth as a son of God's Law just as, until that point, he had lived and behaved in a manner befitting a son of his parents. The Law itself will help the parents continue the training of their child; the concept of a God-given law which must be obeyed should be the parents' most effective tool as they complete the work that was entrusted to them when their child was born.

חנך, "education," requires practice. In Judaism, the Jewish boy is prepared for Jewish manhood not by recitals or memorized speeches, not by yearbook rhetoric or priestly blessings uttered by individuals not entitled to do so, but only by practice, by actively performing all the duties that will be part of his adult life.

What have we to say about a Jewish boy who thinks he need do no more on the day of his *bar mitzvah* than simply step up to the Book of

the Law amidst a congregation of God, declaring אשר נתן לנו תורה אמת, that he is now among those chosen by God to uphold and fulfill His Law, and that this Law is a law of timeless truth and a "tree of life" planted by God into our midst? What have we to say about a Jewish boy who thinks he need do no more on the day of his *bar mitzvah* than preface this declaration with the words ברוך אתה ה', pledging from the depths of his heart to consecrate his life to God? We say that the father of such a lad should find it rather difficult to stand up at the moment of his child's consecration and declare: שפטני מעונשו: של זה "If my son should be lost to You, I am no longer to blame."

All the pomp—the priestly blessing, the parental blessing, the recitation of faith and the rest of the supposed substitutes for a Jewish *bar mitzvah*—are just a figleaf tailored to cover the nakedness of our age.

By the very act of setting their own arbitrary age for confirmation,\* the Reformers have shown that the basic truths to be represented by these exercises mean nothing to them, and that their celebration is based on sham and illusion. In His Law, God, the almighty Creator of mankind and Author of the laws that govern both physical nature and human morality, said כי יהיה לאיש בן, thereby defining the beginning of the year following the boy's thirteenth birthday as a most crucial period during which the Jewish boy becomes a Jewish man.\*\* But what does that matter, the Reformers ask? This period of time is not expressly stated in the Torah. Like all the other שיעורין, the specifications of number, time and space, this is "only" הלכה למשה מסיני (see סוכה :ה)—and in this day and age, we all know how to take these so-called הלכות למשה מסיני\*\*\*. These specifications will simply have to yield to considerations that are much more important nowadays. First of all, consider the inspirational value and the dramatic effect of a wholesale gathering of *bar mitzvah* boys at a given season of the year. Secondly, and particularly, consider that if the *bar mitzvah* boy were to be "*bar mitzvaed*" on the actual date of his *bar mitzvah* in accordance with time-honored (or "medieval," as they would have it) Jewish custom, a

\* R. Hirsch refers to the Reform practice of postponing the age when one was considered *bar mitzvah*, usually to the following *Shevuos* holiday. (Ed.)

\*\* מאימתי נעשה בן סורר ומורה משיבויא ב' שערות ועד שיקיף זקן . . . שנאמר כי יהיה לאיש בן . . . בן . . . ולא איש, קטן פטור שלא בא לכלל מצות (סנהדרין סח:)

\*\*\* See Vol. V of the *Collected Writings*, pp. 229–239. (Ed.)

boy unfortunate enough to live in the countryside [where there was no permanent rabbi] would have to forego the "rabbi's blessing," since, after all, the rabbi's blessing, unlike the dewdrops from heaven, cannot descend upon a million places at the same time. Can you imagine becoming *bar mitzvah* without a rabbi's blessing? Why, in this day and age, it is simply not possible to attain a state of grace in heaven above or on earth below without being blessed by a rabbi!

Although it may not appear so, all this is quite relevant to a discussion of educational issues. Have you ever considered the impression that such arbitrary acts and such an insistence on superficial formalities must create in the mind of a boy at the moment he should be assuming the obligations of law and duty with all the seriousness of a man subordinating himself to the higher authority of God? We pointed out above that, in setting the period immediately following *bar mitzvah* as the age limit for classing a son as "disobedient," the Law apparently did so in order to stress this as the age when a boy's tendencies toward goodness and seriousness should become apparent. We meant to underscore the importance of devoting parental care and wisdom to encourage the development of the sense of duty which begins to germinate within a boy of that age. But in our opinion there can be no greater obstacle to this endeavor than the ceremony of modern, arbitrary superficiality with which our youths are now received at the threshold of the Law and which shows them exactly what place they can assign to the Law in their own lives.

Let us go further into the details of the law under discussion. כִּי יִהְיֶה (Deut. 21, 18), or, in the words of the parents' formal complaint before the court of justice: בָּנֵנוּ בָּנָה "This son of ours is disobedient and rebellious; he does not hearken to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard." Here we have a description of the conduct which the law regards as symptomatic of incorrigibility. סוֹרֵר seems to imply a persistent straying from the path he is supposed to follow, a failing to do what he should be doing. מוֹרֵה, on the other hand seems to imply a self-willed personality, one who not only fails to do the right thing but does precisely what he should not do. This is explained by סַפְרֵי in most significant terms: מוֹרֵה שְׂמוּרָה לַעֲצֻמוֹ דֶּרֶךְ אַחֲרָה; this is open opposition, opposition virtually as a matter of principle. The סַפְרֵי comments further:

סורר על דברי אביו ומורה על דברי אמו, סורר על דברי תורה ומורה על דברי דיינים. He responds to his father with passive disobedience; he simply does not do what his father tells him to do. But he reacts to his mother's wishes with open defiance. Similarly, he quietly disregards the laws of the תורה but confronts its spokesmen with open opposition. Here again we see the role of the father and that of the mother in character training, as already discussed in our first essay on education [p. 299]. In this case, the father is equated with the תורה, while the mother's position is compared to that of the דיינים. It is the father who sets the general guidelines, but it is the mother who performs the most important function on which everything depends, namely, the practical training of the child.

In other words, the son whom we have just described is perverse, stubborn and willful. He is disobedient at a time when he is supposed to be developing seriousness and maturity. Any other kind of disobedience toward God or his parents at this time in his life, or this type of disobedience at some other stage in the young man's life, is not regarded as an infallible sign that he is beyond redemption. Only stubborn, defiant conduct, as denoted by *זולל וסובא*, occurring at a time when the youth is expected to be going through a period of moral awakening makes it clear that any further effort at character training will only end in failure. Along with all the other details of this law which we have yet to discuss, this is a concept of utmost significance.

A *זולל וסובא* is an out-and-out "glutton" and "drunkard." The term *זולל* denotes particularly a glutton so greedy that his desire for good food—say, a good roast—takes precedence over any moral considerations. *זולל*, then, describes the worst kind of moral degradation. It is the diametrical opposite of *יקר וכבוד*, as indicated by the verses *כל מוכרה הוילה* (Lamentations 1, 8) and *אם תוציא יקר מזולל* (Jeremiah 15, 9). God tells Jeremiah: if you succeed in bringing forth something precious from the vile; if you succeed in rescuing and separating the precious in man from that which is base and evil; if, perhaps, you will even succeed in discovering a kernel of human dignity in the midst of moral corruption; if you can take hold of this kernel to awaken and revive it; if you can actually transform the *זולל* into a *יקר*, then *כפי תהיה* "you shall be as My mouth," you will demonstrate that there is true Divine strength in your words. The word *זולל* seems to be related to *צלל*; just as *צלל* implies a physical descent into a deep place where there is no light

(צללו כעופרה במים אדירים), so also זולל denotes a spiritual descent into a seemingly bottomless depth of animal filth, beyond the reach of spirituality or morality.

סבא is simply filling oneself with drink; it is phonetically related to שבע, to appease one's hunger.

Note that the law has instituted the death penalty only for a young person guilty of a kind of gluttony unrelated to any religious observance or prohibition. In order to be considered subject to the death penalty, the youth's excessive indulgence in the pleasures of the table must not be של מצוה; it must not be associated with a מצוה. The plea that his gluttony was occasioned by the performance of a religious precept could be accepted as an extenuating circumstance and save his life. On the other hand—and this is most significant—his gluttony also must not have been של עבירה. The delicacies in which he indulged must not have included מאכלות אסורות, forbidden foods. What the law condemns is an excessive indulgence in foods which in themselves would have been permissible.

It seems that in order to merit the death penalty, the crime itself and the manner in which it was committed must have been such as to demonstrate a total absence of the morality and dignity that are naturally inherent in a human being. It may be expected that a man's inherent sense of dignity will make him feel disgust at the very thought of allowing his appetites to degenerate into animal-like greed. But this very person probably will not feel the same revulsion at the thought of eating foods that are forbidden only because they are prohibited by Divine law. People do not have an instinctive feeling of disgust that would tell them not to eat roast pork, oysters, and other similarly forbidden morsels. If a סורר ומורה, a perverse and willful individual, sees forbidden food, he may revel in them simply because he wants to spite the dietary laws; but in that case his excessive indulgence in these foods is not motivated by gluttony but by a desire to flaunt his "progressive" and "enlightened" reform-mindedness. In סנהדרין ע: we are told explicitly that the culpability applies if he does not hearken to the voice of his parents—אינו שמע בקולנו—but not if, in so doing, he has also disobeyed the voice of God—ולא בקולו של מקום.

Now we might certainly have had every reason to expect that the crime would be considered even more serious if it represents an offense not only against the honor due one's parents but, in addition, against

the honor and glory of God. And yet we see here that if a disobedient son indulges in מאכלות אסורות against the will of his parents, the law actually considers the forbidden character of the food as a reason for leniency. The consumption of מאכלות אסורות, even against the will of the parents, is regarded as less symptomatic of moral depravity than if he had been guilty of gluttony with permitted food in defiance of his parents.

This paradox of the בן סורר ומורה law finds a striking counterpart in our own age. Who does not know sons of our own day and age who obey their parents in every respect except when the parents ask them to obey the law of God? There are children today who would gladly sell their last shirt in order to buy an hour's worth of pleasure for their parents, children who would be willing to die if, by their own death, they could purchase even one additional minute of life for their parents. There are children today who would not be able to bear the thought that someday, walking in the funeral procession of their parents, they might have cause to think that they had been guilty of an act that caused their parents sufficient grief to shorten their lives and that, perhaps, if they had acted differently, they might not yet have had to walk, weeping, behind their parents' coffin. Yet some of these same children will have no compunctions about selling their parents' happiness for the few additional miserable pennies they can earn by working on the Sabbath, and will refuse to sacrifice the fragrant aroma of cigar smoke on the Sabbath even though it upsets their parents. Not even the thought that they are causing their parents the greatest grief imaginable will disturb their un-Jewish pleasures or drip even the tiniest dash of bitterness into the cup of their un-Jewish joys. Then, when their parents die, they will calmly wind a band of black crepe around their hats for the year of mourning, without ever stopping to think that their own un-Jewish conduct had been an even darker band of crepe that saddened their fathers and mothers during their lifetime.

Who has not looked in amazement at this enigma of our age? But lo and behold! the law regarding the בן סורר ומורה presents us with a most perfect parallel. The law of בן סורר ומורה regards an act of willfull disobedience toward parents alone as a more serious crime than an act of disobedience towards parents that also defies God's Will. So, too, the sons of our own age consider their un-Jewish conduct, which constitutes a rebellion against their parents and against God, as less offen-

sive than disregard for their parents' personal wishes. We certainly have no cause to envy the age that can see its own reflection in the law of the *בן סורר ומורה*.

Perhaps we will succeed, further on, in contributing some ideas toward the solution of this psychological enigma. For the moment, however, we will merely point out two additional criteria for the applicability of the *בן סורר ומורה* law: *אִינוֹ נֶעֱשֶׂה בֶן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה עַד שִׁגְנוּב מִשֵּׁל אָבִיו*: "He must have stolen the money from his father and mother [and misappropriated it for his revelry]," and *עַד שִׂיאֵכֶל בַּחֲבוּרָה שְׂכוּלָה*, "he must have committed his revelry [not alone but] in the company of idlers" (*פְּנֵה־דָרִין ע. עַא*).

To recapitulate: willful, perverse disobedience in general, excessive predilection for good food and especially good drink, pilfering at home and keeping bad company—these are the sad criteria by which the law recognizes the future villain. These criteria should therefore engage our special attention and guide us in our work as educators.

Let us dwell for a few moments on the one trait—*זוּלֵל וְטוֹבֵא*—most typical of the *בן סורר ומורה* because this trait is frequently encouraged, albeit unintentionally, by thoughtless upbringing. "Good food and good drink." The home where undue importance is attached to food and drink, where good food and good drink are regarded as basic ingredients for a happy life, where a "good, juicy roast" makes one's day and where the father of the family makes a point of reserving a "treat" for himself or of having a special dish prepared especially for him—such a home is a dangerous environment for the development of young souls that should be taught to appreciate spiritual and moral refinement. If the father and the mother themselves are *זוּלֵלִים* and *טוֹבָאִים*, or have attitudes that are bound to find expression in a life of *זוּלֵלוּת וְטוֹבָאוֹת*, how can they expect their young son to become anything but a *זוּלֵל וְטוֹבֵא*?

Furthermore, do not train your child to become a glutton. Do not use special "treats" as rewards. Allow your child and, indeed, all the members of your household, including your servants, to partake of the same foods as you do. Let your child's diet, and your own, be moderate and frugal. See that he learns from you to eat and drink only in order to live and grow strong for the purpose of serving God. If from time to time you do serve a fancier dish than usual, share it with your child as you would any other food; this will teach him that special

“treats” do not make one attain a higher level of happiness in life. As a matter of fact, you should try to the best of your ability to serve him fancy dishes from time to time, precisely so that he should not become a glutton, so that, by his own experience and by your sharing it with him, he will discover for himself the limits of the happiness he can expect from a good roast or a glass of good wine. In this way the lure of the unknown, of pleasures never or rarely enjoyed, will not acquire for him the exaggerated fascination of forbidden fruit.

But above all, see to it that the truly Jewish attitude of *שמחה של מצוה*, the enjoyment of everything that is spiritually and morally good, of all that is fine and noble in the eyes of God, the joy of duty well done, becomes a permanent part of your home life. Then your child, too, will develop all the moral and spiritual qualities that banish everything base and ignoble, that fill him with loathing and disgust for anything that exposes the sensual aspect of human nature in its unrefined “animal” nakedness. If you follow these guidelines in raising your child, he will avoid *חבורה של סריקין*, the company of idlers, of his own free will, and the very thought of a life of useless luxury will fill him not with pleasure but only with contempt and revulsion.

However, the psychological enigma presented to us not only by the latest developments of our own era but also by the ancient law of the *בן סורר ומורה* should serve as a solemn warning. Why is it that children who are unmindful of their religious duties are much more inclined to comply with the wishes of their parents if the commands are presented to them simply as the will of their parents than if their parents ask them to do something because it is the Will of God? And why is it that the law, seemingly in the same vein, regards disobedience toward parents as a far more serious indication of moral corruption than it does an act of disobedience that defies not just the will of the parents but also *קולו של מקום*, the Will of God?

Might the primary cause for both not be the fact that children can sense, or think they can sense, a difference between the earnestness with which their parents ask them to obey one of their parental wishes and the earnestness shown by the parents when they ask their children to carry out a command of God? Could it be that children can tell, or think they can tell, that when their parents ask them to carry out one of God's commandments, they act only as compliant messengers of God, speaking only in the name of God, routinely conveying His com-

mands to their children only because they do not want to be guilty of a sin against God, but not because they are echoing the pulsebeat of their own hearts? Is it possible that what the parents tell their children to do in the name of God is not a vital part of their own lives? Perhaps the children sense that their parents do not regard the fulfillment of God's Will as the very foundation of their own happiness, that their parents feel they have done enough if they ask their child to observe God's laws as long as the child is under age, still living under the parents' roof. But once the child has reached adulthood, living on his own and no longer subject to the authority of his parents, and has been given an account of his own in God's great ledger, he may think that if he casts aside God's commandments he may indeed be guilty of disobedience toward God but not remiss in his duty toward his parents. Such children may think that if their parents had not become bound to the discipline of God's Law by force of habit, the parents, too, might share the un-Jewish attitudes adopted by their children. If the parents were younger and more involved in present-day affairs, might they not go over to un-Jewish ways of life themselves? Who can tell? Perhaps, in their hearts, the parents really think their children are right; perhaps, deep in their hearts, the parents, too, criticize, deplore and lament the laws that place so many hindrances and obstacles into the path of the struggling new generation. Perhaps the one consideration that keeps the parents from making a clean break themselves is not love of the Law or genuine joy in its observance but only the pitiful fact that they are afraid of God. But the new generation is bolder, more courageous and enlightened than its elders. That which their parents may still view as a bright and flashing pillar of fire and cloud to guide men in their wanderings through the wilderness is for the new generation just a miserable scarecrow set up for little sparrows. Could such considerations, or similar ones, explain these puzzling phenomena of present-day life?

It could hardly be otherwise. Children who have gone over to un-Jewish ways must have sensed a difference between the mood in which their parents asked them to do their personal bidding and that in which their parents told them to do something commanded by God's Will. Were this not so, these children would not show such ready, tender devotion in obeying the personal wishes of their parents and, at



a question you should not hesitate or reflect before answering but should give him an immediate, definite answer." You should not need time to consider your answer when you are faced with the question whether your own child, or anyone else for that matter, may ever be permitted to violate the commandment *יום השבת לקדשו* for the sake of his business or his career, any more than you would need time to think over your reply if the question involved the commandments *לא תענה* or *לא תגנוב* and *לא תלבש שעטני* just as firmly as you would for *לא תחלל את בןך להזנותה*, etc. See to it that, above all, your child should learn to serve God with joyous determination by observing how you yourselves conduct your lives. In the spirit of Rabbi Akiba, do not accept the positive commandments with an exultant "Yes, I will," but the negative commandments only with a reluctant "No, I will not," *על הן הן ועל לאו לאו*. You must welcome also the restrictions and prohibitions of the Law with a loud and joyful "Yes," *על הן הן ועל* (*לאו הן מכילתא יתרו פרשה ד'*). See to it that your manner of complying with a prohibition should enrich your lives and your hearts no less than the observance of the most blissful positive commandment. And see to it that you will never be ashamed to show your grief, not even in front of your own child, if he behaves un-Jewishly; do not bury your sorrow deep within you, afraid to make it clear to your child that you still cherish your Judaism with all your heart and soul. Make it clear to your child that if ever he should be lost to Judaism, to the true Jewish way of life commanded by Jewish law, he will be lost to you as well.

The law of the *סורר ומורה* includes one more provision that is most remarkable and hence deserving of our special attention: the presupposition of complete equality and harmony between both parents in the education of the child. "If someone has a perverse and willful son who does not hearken to the voice of his father and to the voice of his mother, *אינו שמע בקול אביו ובקול אמו*," we are told, "and *they* chastise him but he [still] does not listen to *them*, *ויסרו אותו ולא ישמע אליהם*, Then his father and his mother shall take him to the court of justice *ותפשו בו* בנגו זה סורר ומרה, and *both of them* shall denounce him, saying: *אביו ואמו* and *אינו שמע בקולנו* 'This son of *ours* is perverse and willful; he does not hearken to *our* voice . . .'" To this, the Talmud (*סנהדרין עא*) adds: *היה אביו רוצה ואמו אינה רוצה או אמו רוצה ואביו אינו רוצה אינו נעשה בן סורר ומורה עד שיהו שניהם רוצין*. "If his father wants him punished, but his mother does

not, or vice versa, the law concerning the *בן סורר ומורה* is not applicable to him until both his parents are in agreement that he should be punished." In fact, *ר' יהודה*, the sage who viewed the *בן סורר ומורה* law primarily as an academic and instructive problem, notes that לא היה אמו שוה לאביו בקול במראה ובקומה אינו נעשה סורר ומורה שנאמר איננו שמע בקלנו "if his mother was not like his father in voice, appearance and stature, the son could not be sentenced as a *סורר ומורה*, as it is written: 'He does not hearken to our voice'; even as the voice of his father and his mother must be only one, so they must be alike also in appearance and stature." *ר' יהודה* insists that the father and the mother had to be completely alike even in their physical appearance, which certainly has a strong impact on a youthful personality such as that of a *בן סורר ומורה*. The son should not be more impressed by one parent than by the other; he must be equally impressed by both. In a case where the parents are not alike, even in such supposedly superficial traits as physical appearance, and hence do not leave the same impression upon the senses, the court of justice has grounds to suspect that even this difference between the parents may have had an adverse effect on the education of the child. Hence the son's vile behavior cannot be explained by the simple assumption that his basic character was rotten from the very beginning.

From this word of our Sages we infer (*דרוש וקבל שכר*) a basic prerequisite that may well be the most important factor of all in the raising of a child. In order for their endeavors to succeed, the child's father and mother must be equals, completely in agreement, of one heart and mind with regard to the education of their child and their influence upon him. It is a common occurrence that children will perceive their father as lenient and their mother as strict, or vice versa. Too many unthinking mothers make constant use of the trite threat, "Just wait till your father comes home," little realizing how damaging this can be in the character training of a child. But the damage is infinitely greater if the child's father and mother differ from one another not merely in their educational methods but on the fundamental rules and principles by which the child is to be raised. If the child sees that his parents cannot agree on what is permitted and what is forbidden, if, when his father forbids something, the child can read a dispensation in his mother's eyes, or vice versa, then the child will often make his own decision. He will listen neither to his father nor to his mother but will

turn to the little "pope" inside himself, as it were, for a dispensation to disobey both his parents.

בנו . . . קלנו, "*our child*" . . . "*our voice*"—these words hold the key to the secret of proper child-raising. A father and a mother united as one in their love for their child and in complete agreement on the principles by which he should be raised—herein lies the strength and the hope of all education. But such true unity can be achieved only if the child's father and mother are united also in their own subordination to the Will of God; if they view the sacred function of child-rearing as their most sacred task, to be performed for God and in keeping with His holy Will; if "that which is right in His eyes" will be the principle that guides them both; and if His judgments will, as a matter of course, serve to resolve any disagreements in their views and attitudes, disagreements which, given the complexities of life and of human relationships, will occur even between the best people. This is surely the reason why the basis of the educational failure as derived from the laws of *בן סורר ומורה* is given in the following terms—*אם לא היתה אמו ראויה—לאביו אינו נעשה בן סורר ומורה (פנהרדין עא.)*